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BEFORE THE ARIZONA CORPORATION COMMISSION VED

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IN THE MATTER OF US WEST

COMMUNICATIONS, INC.'S COMPLIANCE WITH SECTION 271 OF THE

TELECOMMUNICATIONS ACT OF 1996.

IN THE MATTER OF QWEST CORPORATION'S COMPLIANCE WITH SECTION 252(e) OF THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS ACT OF 1996.

ARIZONA CORPORATION COMMISSION,

Complainant.

|| v.

QWEST CORPORATION.

Respondent.

Docket No. T-00000A-97-0238

Docket No. RT-00000F-02-0271

Docket No. T-01051B-02-0871

INITIAL CLOSING BRIEF OF THE RESIDENTIAL UTILITY CONSUMER OFFICE

The Residential Utility Consumer Office ("RUCO") respectfully submits its initial closing brief.

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INTRODUCTION

The proposed Settlement Agreement ("Settlement") fails to achieve its desired objective - the deterrence of future improper conduct by Qwest. The Settlement is not in the public interest¹.

The Settlement assumes that payment of money equates to deterrence. It doesn't. Time and time again, Qwest has paid large fines to state and federal regulatory authorities for violations of their rules and laws. The payment of large sums of money seems to be just a cost of doing business to Qwest. In this case, it is an insignificant cost based on Qwest's most recent reported revenues. Given the opportunity to make a large profit, it is unlikely that Qwest will be deterred by the terms of the Settlement. Moreover, the terms of the Settlement will become even less significant the worse Qwest's financial position becomes.

There is no guarantee that any remedy will deter future misconduct. The goal, however, should be to establish as much of a deterrent as possible. Staff's suggestion that the Commission should establish a "trust and verify" position is misplaced. Based on Qwest's promises, the Commission has already given Qwest favorable consideration on the biggest issues before it. Qwest has abused the Commission's trust on these issues by either misinterpreting the Commission's intent and/or through its improper conduct. Placing this Commission's trust in Qwest's hands is not only poor business judgment, it is wrought with peril for the consumers of Arizona. Rather, this Commission should make Qwest earn its trust. It should communicate to Qwest that inappropriate conduct in the

RUCO's testimony only addresses the Settlement from the perspective of its resolution of the 252

docket and 271 sub-docket. RUCO was not a participant in the wholesale rate enforcement docket and therefore takes no position with regard to its resolution.

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For ease of reference, trial exhibits will be identified similar to their identification in the Transcript of Proceedings. The Transcript volume number and page number will identify references to the Transcript.

future will not be tolerated and there will be severe consequences. Similar to what this Commission does in Securities matters, the Commission should hold Qwest accountable for its conduct by making findings that Qwest acted illegally. Commission ruin the business incentive for Qwest to engage in similar conduct in the future.

THE TERMS OF THE SETTLEMENT

The Settlement does not go far enough to hold Qwest accountable for its egregious conduct. The Settlement includes a Recital section where, among other things, Qwest acknowledges, without admitting any wrongdoing, that there are allegations that its behavior was designed to intentionally deceive and misrepresent certain facts before the Commission. J-1 at 2.2 Qwest avows that it will not engage in deceptive and unlawful conduct before the Commission in the future. Id. According to Qwest, this language was included in the Settlement to address concerns raised by Staff and RUCO. Transcript, Vol. Lat 106. For the reasons set forth in the remainder of this Brief, the language in the Settlement does not satisfactorily address RUCO's concern that Qwest be held accountable for its' improper and illegal conduct.

The Settlement also includes a section entitled "Terms and Conditions". Here, RUCO takes issue with the following:

> Settlement - § 2, pp. 3-6 - the Settlement is silent as to whether a) Qwest will be able to earn a return on its voluntary contributions. RUCO's position that the Commission should include in its Order an explicit

provision that Qwest will not be able to earn a return on its "voluntary contributions." The basis for RUCO's position is set forth in § I (A) below.

- b) Settlement § 3, p. 6 this section of the Settlement provides that Qwest will issue a one-time credit to eligible CLECs, equal to 10% of the total amount of services purchased under sections 251 (b) and (c) of the Act. The credit applies to those purchases made during the period of January 1, 2001 through June 30, 2001. RUCO recommends that this term be changed to allow a one-time credit for purchases made during a three-year period and should be applied to all types of purchases (i.e. not limited to just §252 services).³
- c) Settlement §2, pp. 3-6 the Settlement provides that Qwest will make voluntary contributions towards infrastructure investment in unserved and underserved areas throughout Arizona. Because of Qwest's previous promises and the lack of any future timetable for Qwest to comply, RUCO recommends that the Commission require a commitment from Qwest of an acceptable timetable when broadband services will be available in the underserved areas.⁴

The basis for RUCO's recommendation is that the minimum time period for the Eschelon deal was 5 years and the McLeod agreement had a minimum period of 3 ½ years, and both applied to <u>all</u> purchases. RUCO believes that the Settlement should provide for a discount period that approaches the minimum of what was agreed to in the secret agreements and applies to the same services that were purchased. RUCO-1 at 12.

RUCO would also note that Qwest's contributions to implement infrastructure in underserved areas is nothing more than what Qwest has promised before and is responsible for doing. If Qwest is going to be able to use penalty money toward something it has already committed to do, the Commission should at minimum prescribe a timetable and hold Qwest to its word. RUCO-1 at 12-13.

THE SETTLEMENT IS NOT IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST

A. THE PROPOSED PENALTY WILL NOT DETER QWEST FROM FUTURE MISCONDUCT

For any resolution to be in the public interest, the Commission must remediate the harm Qwest caused to the integrity of its regulatory process as well as to competition⁵. Under some circumstances, a large fine may be the answer. However, for the following reasons, the proposed fine in this case will have a minimal impact and is unlikely to deter Qwest from engaging in similar behavior in the future. A finding of wrongdoing would be in the public interest. It would restore the integrity of the Commission's regulatory process and be a strong deterrent of future misconduct.

In the past, the payment of substantial penalties has not deterred Qwest from wrongdoing. Since 1996, Qwest has paid this Commission over \$4.5 million in penalties regarding the Quality of Service Tariff. RUCO-1 at 7. Qwest has also paid substantial penalties in other states. In Florida, Qwest paid \$3.25 million to settle slamming complaints, in California, Qwest paid \$20 million in penalties for slamming violations, and in Arizona, Qwest settled for over \$3 million to resolve similar type complaints. Id. It is reasonable for this Commission to conclude that Qwest considers fines a cost of doing business and is not deterred by having to pay them.

The amount of the penalty is also insufficient to deter Qwest from future misconduct. While an approximate \$22 million penalty is a substantial amount of money by most standards, it must be considered in the context for which it is offered. Qwest

RUCO's argument assumes wrongdoing as well as resulting harm (which is a reasonable presumption given the terms of the proposed Settlement). These issues have already been litigated and briefed and will not be repeated here.

reported 2001 gross revenues of \$19.695 billion⁶. RUCO-1, Exhibit-1. The Settlement 1 maximum represents one-tenth of 1% of Qwest's total 2001 revenue. Id. at 8. Such a 2 3 4 5 6 7

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small percentage will do little to deter Qwest from future wrongdoing. It is more likely to provide Qwest with a business incentive to engage in misconduct where Qwest stands to benefit disproportionately to the amount of any potential fine. That decision becomes even easier when Qwest factors in the small probability of getting caught. Again, the financial penalty does not redress the conduct, it simply makes the penalty a cost to consider when doing business.

Finally, the proposed penalty is not representative of the actual amount Qwest will be penalized if it is allowed to earn a return on investments made from the voluntary contributions. Qwest argues that it should be afforded rate base treatment of the investments that it would have otherwise not made. Q-2 at 15. From Qwest's perspective, they are not the ones who will decide where the infrastructure should go so they should be able to recover dollar for dollar their investment. Transcript, Vol. I at 109-111. In other words. Qwest expects to get paid back any investment it makes in infrastructure pursuant to the voluntary contributions.

It is misleading to call the type of investment that Qwest is contemplating a "voluntary contribution". In reality, it is, from Qwest's perspective, an investment in which Qwest intends to earn a return⁷. From a public relations standpoint, Qwest will be able to appeal to the public by promoting the investment in infrastructure that they would not have otherwise made. Either way, Qwest, once again, places itself in a position where it is able

At the time of the Hearing, Qwest had not restated its annual 2002 gross revenues.

This is another example of why this Commission needs to be very careful to make sure that there is a clear understanding of each and every aspect of this agreement prior to approval.

to defeat the spirit of the Commission's objective to remediate Qwest's conduct and deter future misconduct. The Commission should make it clear from the outset that Qwest will not be able to earn a return through regulated rates on any investment that is a part of this Settlement.

B. THE COMMISSION SHOULD NOT ADOPT STAFF'S RECOMMENDED 'TRUST BUT VERIFY' POLICY WITH QWEST

Staff has adopted a "trust, but verify" policy towards Qwest and this Settlement Agreement. Transcript, Vol. II at 329. Staff believes that a healthy, properly functioning regulatory regime requires trust and that, at this point, Staff will begin with the premise that it can trust Qwest. Id at 329, 362. Staff intends to continue with that premise "... until we see behavior that would indicate that a different approach or different scenario is in effect." Id. at 362. RUCO respects Staff's attitude, however, in this case, it is severely misplaced. Trust is something that needs to be earned, and Qwest has not earned it. It is Qwest's recent abuse of this Commission's trust that is at the heart of the 252 and 271 proceedings. However, Qwest has demonstrated a pattern of abusing the Commission's trust that goes back further than the conduct that is the subject of the 252 docket and 271 subdocket.

In Decision No. 62672, (Qwest's merger with US West – June 30, 2000), the Commission ordered Qwest, because of the compelling need to upgrade Arizona's rural telephone services, to invest roughly \$48.24 million annually to upgrade or extend services in rural exchanges in "central offices of 50,000 or less access lines." During the Commission's deliberations at the Open Meeting which resulted in the final Order, it was clear that the Commission's intent was to require Qwest to invest in rural service areas. Qwest never informed the Commission prior to its Decision that exchange areas of 50,000

access lines included larger metropolitan areas — which was clearly not what the Commission intended in its Decision. RUCO-1 at 5-6. Qwest's conduct made it clear at that time that the Commission needs to watch its back when dealing with Qwest. Now Staff is suggesting that the Commission should trust Qwest, but still watch its back through verification. Staff's new policy is inconsistent with its goal of a healthy, properly functioning regulatory regime. It should not be the job of the Commission to verify the representations made by Qwest. As with all the companies it regulates, the Commission should be able to rely on the veracity of those representations. The check to assure that companies act honestly are swift and stiff penalties, not a verification procedure.

The merger itself was predicated on highly inaccurate future business scenarios purported by Qwest, which resulted in undeservedly favorable treatment by the Commission. In that docket, (T-01051B-99-0497), Qwest persuaded the Commission to approve the merger, because, according to Qwest, the merger would result in approximately \$18.5 billion of pro-forma year-2000 revenue; during the period from 2000 through 2005 the merger would enable Qwest to achieve gross revenue synergies of more than \$12 billion and net financial and operational synergies of approximately \$10.5 to \$11 billion; the merger would result in the acceleration of the deployment of broadband communications; the merger would allow for the redeployment of approximately \$7.5 billion toward new investment in Internet applications and out-of-region broadband access and Internet services; and the merger would actually increase Qwest's incentives to meet consumer demands. Id. at 6.

In fact, what has actually happened to Qwest since the merger has been the subject of newspaper headlines throughout Qwest's fourteen-state region. Since the merger, Qwest's credit rating has been cut to junk, it's stock price has hit all-time lows, it has been

the subject of numerous federal investigations including the SEC's investigation into Qwest's accounting, the US Attorney's investigation of criminal wrongdoing, a congressional investigation in conjunction with Global Crossing, and a US General Service Administration announcement that it would review all governmental contracts that it had with Qwest. Qwest has experienced substantial quarterly revenue losses and announced that it made \$1.5 billion in accounting errors in 2002, creating the scenario that a bankruptcy filing was impending. It was only a short time after the merger that it was clear

Perhaps the most egregious abuse of this Commission's trust occurred as the result of Qwest's conduct in the 252 docket and 271 subdockets. Here, Qwest acted with complete disregard for the law and with this Commission's regulatory process. It was only after Qwest was actually caught in Minnesota and an investigation commenced that it terminated the core agreements which are the subject of the 252 docket and 271 subdockets. Ironically, Qwest and Staff are now before this Commission requesting that this Commission make no findings with regard to Qwest's past misconduct, and asking this Commission to place its trust in Qwest that it will act appropriately in the future. Clearly, approval of such a request would send the message that utilities can violate the law and still maintain the Commission's trust by paying a penalty; in other words, the Commission's trust does not have to be earned, it can be bought. The Commission should avoid establishing such a precedent.

the merger would not result in the benefits that Qwest claimed. Id. at 6-7.

C. FINDINGS OF WRONGDOING ARE NECESSARY TO RESTORE THE INTEGRITY OF THE COMMISSION'S PROCESS

When considering the Settlement, it is important to remember exactly how egregious the conduct under consideration was and the effect that it had on the integrity of

integrity. It offended not only the administrative process but also the fundamentals upon which the American judicial system are based⁸. In short, the most serious harm was not to the consumer or the CLECs but to this Commission and the public's perception of it.

this Commission's process. Qwest's conduct went to the core of this Commission's

The record establishes that Qwest entered into, and failed to file, agreements with two of its largest wholesale customers, McLeod and Eschelon, not to participate in the Commission's process to review Qwest's compliance with §271 of the Federal Telecommunications Act. Id. at 4. It is clear from the record that McLeod and Eschelon were experiencing significant service-related problems with Qwest. Because of the secret agreements, the Commission was unaware of the service-related issues during the course of its 271 process. In the case of Eschelon, relations turned so bad that at one point, Qwest attempted to solicit compliance with the non-participation agreement by requesting that Eschelon destroy certain records and file supporting testimony and testify when requested by Qwest and in a manner suitable to Qwest. Throughout this time, Qwest was assuring this Commission in the 271 case that it was in compliance with the various checklist items required by the Act, including requirements to provide CLECs access to its network. Id.

In addition, it is clear from the record that Qwest deliberately and intentionally failed to file interconnection agreements that, by law, this Commission is required to approve. Those agreements decided such things as rates and services between Qwest and the CLEC. In effect, Qwest, through its actions, assumed the role and carried out the function

Destroying documents and coercing testimony offends all notions of fairness and are contrary to the principles upon which the American Justice System and the Commission's Administrative system are based.

of the Commissioners. Id. at 5.

The Settlement does not provide a solution that restores the integrity of the Commission's process. It suggests that a relatively insignificant payment⁹ and some procedural safeguards are sufficient to address the concern. It also leaves the public with the impression that the Commission is more interested in the money than defending its process and deterring future conduct. The Settlement, in reality, is likely to further alienate the public's perception of the Commission's process and tarnish future regulatory processes by encouraging tolerance of Qwest-like conduct.

Furthermore, without findings of wrongdoing and an Order proscribing such conduct, it will be difficult for the Commission to enforce other unlawful conduct. RUCO has a strong concern with the Settlement regarding the Commission's contempt powers in future instances of misconduct. An Order adopting the Settlement would only allow the Commission to invoke its contempt powers for failing to comply with the Settlement's explicit requirements. An Order proscribing a broad category of misconduct would allow the Commission to invoke its contempt powers for any act or actions that falls within the scope of the category of misconduct¹⁰.

In approving the Settlement, the Commission should make a finding that Qwest acted illegally. Further, the Commission should make a finding that Qwest interfered with and obstructed its process. These two findings should then be the basis for the Commission to order Qwest to cease such conduct. An order to cease and desist such

Comparing the Settlement amount to 2001 gross revenues as stated above.

What RUCO is suggesting is similar to what the Commission does all the time in Securities matters. The Commission makes findings, and orders the wrongdoer to cease and desist from the illegal conduct even if the wrongdoer does not admit or deny the findings. See for example Decision No. 66320 in Docket No. S-03535A-03-0000.

conduct will allow the Commission to invoke its contempt powers if Qwest engages in similar conduct in the future. Moreover, actual findings of misconduct by this Commission will serve as an acknowledgement by this Commission that Qwest engaged in wrongdoing and allow for its consideration in future proceedings involving Qwest. Qwest will never be able to appear before this Commission and argue that this Commission cannot consider this instance because there was never a finding of wrongdoing. Finally, such findings/orders will send the message to Qwest, as well as other regulated utilities, that utilities that engage in future wrongdoing in Arizona will not be able simply to buy their way out of it.

D. THE SETTLEMENT DOES NOT CONSIDER ESCHELON AND McLEOD'S MISCONDUCT

Qwest was not the only participant guilty of wrongdoing. Eschelon and McLeod were also involved in the scheme to defraud this Commission. Should the Commission consider holding Eschelon and McLeod accountable, a finding against Qwest is necessary since the scheme involved Qwest. Not finding Qwest responsible for wrongdoing and clearing Eschelon and McLeod of any wrongdoing will compound the consequences of their acts — it will send the message to CLECs contemplating illegal behavior that at least under some circumstance they will not have to fear any consequences from this Commission. Id. at 10. It will also further erode the public's confidence in the integrity of the Commission and its process.

Staff has decided not to address this issue at this time. Staff believes that McLeod and Eschelon obtained benefits without the Commission's approval but believes the matter

¹¹ RUCO's conclusion that both McLeod and Eschelon are parties in the 252 docket is based on its legal analysis set forth on pages 13-16 of its Post-Hearing Reply Brief filed on May 15, 2003 in Docket No. RT-00000F-02-0271 (252 docket). RUCO incorporates its analysis here.

would best be addressed in another proceeding. Staff has not decided whether to initiate another proceeding. Transcript, Vol. II at 386-387. The flaw in Staff's argument is that approval of the Settlement without making findings of Qwest's wrongdoing would preclude any legal basis for the Commission to proceed against Eschelon and McLeod, in effect, resulting in the Commission's tacit approval of their conduct. The Commission should not preclude itself from recourse against Eschelon and McLeod.

CONCLUSION

The approval of the Settlement would not be in the public interest. The Commission should make findings that Qwest's conduct was discriminatory and illegal. The Commission should also make findings that Eschelon and McLeod engaged in a scheme with Qwest to defraud this Commission, the public and other CLECs. Finally, Qwest should not be able to earn a return on its "voluntary contributions".

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED this 15th day of October, 2003.

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